

Going Gun-Ho?

Written by Lou Gehrig Burnett
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Lines drawn in the sand over gun control in America



Weapons are drawn for what promises to be a gun fight reminiscent of the one that took place at the OK Corral on October 26, 1881 in Tombstone, Arizona Territory, between outlaws and lawmen. The lawmen won.

The Obama administration and anti-gun advocates are one side, and the National Rifle Association (NRA) and pro-gun groups are on the other. Who will still be standing when this shootout is over is anybody's guess.

Armed with the emotion from the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and with national polls showing that a majority of Americans want stricter gun controls, President Obama, sworn in to a second term Monday, has put forth the most ambitious legislative agenda to curb gun violence in decades.

His main legislative proposals are:

*Requiring criminal background checks on all gun sales, including private sales.

*Banning "military-style" assault weapons.

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*Limiting ammunition magazines to 10 rounds.

*Strengthening penalties for gun trafficking.

In addition, the president, by executive orders, is attempting to bolster current laws and free up mental health officials to report who they consider dangerous individuals to the proper authorities.

Despite the many mass murders that have occurred in recent years, the NRA is not deterred and determined to defeat every gun control initiative the president and any member of Congress puts forward.

The NRA is perhaps looking to regain its footing, a.k.a. clout, after spending \$13 million to defeat President Obama. That effort failed. It also spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in eight U.S. Senate races and lost seven of them.

Nevertheless, give credit where credit is due. The NRA has spent more than \$20 million in recent years on Congressional races – 83% of it on Republicans — and enjoys wide support among members of both parties. It will not be easy for the president to get his initiatives passed.

And the NRA has done an effective job in building its membership, now at 4.2 million, by convincing gun lovers that the federal government is out to eliminate the Second Amendment to the Constitution, which guarantees citizens the right to bear arms.

The latest Rasmussen Reports national telephone survey reveals that 65% of American adults think the purpose of the Second Amendment is to make sure that people are able to protect themselves from tyranny.

At the same time, there is reason for concern among NRA members. Polls also reveal that a

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majority of Americans now favor more gun controls, including a ban on assault-style weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips.

Anti-gun advocates are doing their best to portray the NRA as showing a lack of compassion for the 20 school kids and six adults who were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary by a lone assassin.

The NRA retaliated by putting an attack ad on its website which featured the president's federally protected children, heretofore a no-no in political fights.

The NRA ad has drawn criticism from the news media and public officials.

Republican Gov. Chris Christie of New Jersey called the ad "reprehensible" and said the NRA lost some credibility by making the ad.

The gun fight will not be pretty, and there will be a lot of political bloodshed before it ends.

Reactions vary

In Louisiana, the reaction to President Obama's proposals were all over the map. Predictably, Republican Gov. Bobby Jindal called them an abuse of power and an attempt to undermine the Second Amendment.

Jindal has his own plan, which is tracking severely mentally ill persons in a national database, along with checking for a criminal background when someone purchases a gun.

As a state, Louisiana has the second highest murder rate on a per capita basis in the country with 11.2 murders for every 100,000 residents.

Democratic New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu,, who heads the nation's most murderous city on a per capita basis, said the gun control proposals were a "step in the right direction."

St. Tammany Parish Sheriff Jack Strain said he does not believe gun control will make anyone

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safer and that a person bent on violence will find a hammer, or a chainsaw, or a knife. He blames the gun violence on the mentally ill who have access to a weapon often at home. Interestingly, sheriffs and police chiefs seem to be in disagreement about the best way to handle gun violence.

The National Sheriffs Association believes a comprehensive approach that focuses on mental health issues is the only way to prevent future tragedies. It did say it is ready to work with the Obama administration to protect the nation's children and communities by reducing gun violence.

The International Association of Chiefs of Police, in an official statement, commended President Obama and Vice President Joe Biden for the comprehensive package of proposals to combat gun violence.

The organization said the proposals and actions reflect an effective, balanced approach to addressing the plague of gun violence in the communities of the nation.

Absent in all the discussions and comments, some analysts say, is the issue of parental responsibility. They cite the fact that the mother of Adam Lanza, who committed the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary, had an arsenal of weapons unsecured when she knew her son had mental problems.

Should parents be held responsible for minors who commit a crime with a gun that was owned by the parents and was not secured or had a gun lock? At some point, that thinking will likely be a part of the intense discussions that are taking place on gun controls.

Fleming's take

Republican 4th District U.S. Rep. John Fleming of Minden issued this opinion piece about President Obama's proposals:

"The Obama campaign is back in action (did it ever end?). And just like his presidential campaign, the president is playing fast and loose with misinformation that would make the Enquirer blush, as he pushes for sweeping new restrictions on our Second Amendment rights.

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“In his remarks on Wednesday the president paused to let the crowd cheer his call for universal background checks. He then claimed that background checks, over the last 14 years, have ‘kept 1.5 million of the wrong people from getting their hands on a gun.’ That’s nowhere near reality...

“We also heard from the president that ‘as many as 40% of all gun purchases are conducted without a background check.’ This oft-repeated claim is based solely on a small survey done in the 90s, and it includes many exchanges between family members such as fathers and sons, inheritances, and sales between friends or neighbors... the 40% figure is grossly exaggerated.

“Then there’s the language the president likes to use – calling for a ban on ‘military style assault weapons.’ Even the Washington Post – not exactly a bastion of conservatism – has raised questions about this term, explaining how the name ‘assault weapon’ was popularized by an 80’s gun control activist, Josh Sugarmann...Stoking fear is what Obama and Sugarmann are all about.

“Finally, there’s the gun myth that hits close to me. I’ve been a family physician for more than 30 years and the president would like doctors to ask our patients about the guns they may have in their homes. Let’s be clear about this...being Obama’s deputy is not what doctors pledged to do when they took the Hippocratic oath.

“Most of Obama’s executive orders were senseless...Most deserved to be ignored...I will stay vigilant in making sure none of them go beyond the bluster they were at this week’s ‘gun show’ by Obama.”

Lou Gehrig Burnett is a seasoned veteran of national and local politics. He publishes Fax-Net Update, a weekly political newsletter.